



## Rep. Kirk Pearson Rep. Dan Kristiansen

# Report to Seniors

• 39th District •



Fall 2003

Dear friends,

*With a new legislative session soon arriving in January, we would like to provide this senior citizen report to you.*

*Our greatest challenge in the 2003 session was closing a \$2.7 billion gap in the budget. Our priority was to make sure that the budget adopted would be sustainable and protect important programs for seniors, the disabled, and the most vulnerable. Indeed, we were able to accomplish that goal while preventing general fund taxes from being increased.*

*This report provides information on several of these and other issues important to our senior community.*

*Your calls and letters are very much appreciated. Senior citizen issues remain at the top of our legislative agendas. We encourage you to continue communicating with us. Please let us know how we may help.*

Sincerely,

**Rep. Kirk Pearson**

Sedro-Woolley office: (360) 856-3588

Olympia office: (360) 786-7816 (*During legislative sessions only.*)

**Rep. Dan Kristiansen**

Olympia office: (360) 786-7967

**Toll-free  
legislative hotline:  
1-800-562-6000**



## Remaining vigilant for seniors in the state budget

Government should try to be efficient and accountable as possible with your money. We also believe government must make choices and set priorities. One of those priorities must be helping senior citizens.



In recent years, as revenue to the state budget has declined, senior programs have become easy targets. For example, nearly 28 nursing homes in Washington have closed since 1998 – seven of them in just the past year. Many of those closures are largely due to federal Medicare reductions and from state underfunding of Medicaid. It becomes increasingly important as the Legislature faces budget challenges that we protect existing services to seniors and to our state's most vulnerable.

The final budget we adopted in June preserves funding for the developmentally disabled and elderly in nursing homes. It provides a 75-cent-per hour pay increase for in-home health care workers and funds 100,000 slots for the Basic Health Plan, up from 60,000 the governor had proposed, without continued cost overruns for taxpayers.

Nursing homes found their own way out of their money problems – taxing themselves. The tax money will flow back to the nursing homes, and the federal Medicaid match will allow nursing homes to nearly double their money. This will help ensure that the doors will remain open at our local nursing homes.

Rising costs of health care continue to be of great concern. Part of those costs are driven by skyrocketing malpractice insurance premiums that doctors must pay to stay in business. We had hoped that legislation would be adopted to limit lawsuits and attorney contingency fees that have pushed up the costs of malpractice insurance premiums. Unfortunately, an agreement on this issue was not reached before the end of this year's session. This issue will continue to be a priority when the Legislature gathers in January 2004.

# Report to Seniors

## Providing meaningful prescription drug assistance

In a nation as prosperous as ours, senior citizens should be able to get the prescription drugs they need at their local pharmacy at prices they can afford. Unfortunately, the cost of prescription drugs has been increasing by 18 percent each year for several years. Many of our seniors no longer can afford their medicines.



We worked together to pass a prescription drug bill that would help seniors who are uninsured or otherwise unable to afford their prescriptions.

The plan we supported directs the state's Health Care Authority to negotiate price discounts for Washington residents 50 and older or disabled with income up to 300 percent of the Federal Poverty Level and lacking prescription drug coverage. The measure passed the Legislature and was signed into law. The volume discounts it provides from the state's ability to buy in bulk will allow consumers to save money.

## Senior property tax relief - An idea whose time has come

It's important that we do everything possible to make sure people who have paid property taxes all of their lives and now are on fixed incomes are not taxed out of their own homes. That's why Rep. Pearson co-sponsored legislation this year to increase the income threshold limits on the state's existing senior citizen property tax relief program up to \$34,000. The measure, House Bill 1029, would also have allowed deductions for health-care coverage, including dental, vision, co-payments for Medicare and long-term care, to allow more seniors to qualify for property tax relief.

Rep. Kristiansen also co-sponsored legislation to change the burden of proof on property tax appeals. Under HB 1429, if the increase in property tax valuation was more than two percent per year, it would have been the responsibility of the county assessor or Department of Revenue to show that the valuation was correct.

Unfortunately, of the eight senior citizen property tax relief bills introduced this year, including the two we co-sponsored, none was allowed to come up for a vote in the House Finance Committee. We will continue to work on this issue until you get the tax breaks you deserve.



**Rep. Dan Kristiansen**

## Prescription drug discounts available

Several drug companies have announced voluntary discount programs for Medicare-eligible patients with low to moderate incomes. Eligible subscribers to these programs can receive brand-name prescriptions at a 20 to 40 percent discount or with affordable co-pays of just \$12 to \$15.

Toll-free phone numbers are provided below, so you can find out if you qualify or want to learn more about these programs.

- **GlaxoSmithKline – Orange Card**  
1-888-ORANGE6
- **Novartis Care Card**  
1-866-974-CARE
- **Pfizer Share Card**  
1-800-717-6005
- **Lilly Answers Card**  
1-877-RX-Lilly
- **Together Rx**  
1-800-865-7211



# State Representatives **KIRK PEARSON • DAN KRISTIANSEN**

## Are you getting the tax breaks you deserve?



Although we were not able to increase property tax relief this year for seniors, you may still be able to take advantage of the state's existing senior tax relief program. You may qualify for property tax exemptions if you meet all of the following criteria:

- You are at least 61 years of age or disabled
- You own and live in a single-family home, mobile home, or condominium.
- You have a combined household income not exceeding \$30,000.

Expenses for some nursing or home health care and some prescription drugs may be deducted when calculating your income. You also can remain eligible for tax breaks if your home is rented while you're in the hospital or nursing home.

## Valuation limit freeze for qualified seniors

Qualifying citizens are entitled to property tax exemptions on their principal residence and up to one acre of land. The value of the residence is frozen at its value on Jan. 1 of the year in which you first qualify for the program.

### Exemption schedule

You are eligible for the following exemptions if your combined household income falls within the range indicated:

<u>Income</u>	<u>Exemption</u>
\$24,001 to \$30,000	All excess levies (special school levies are an example of excess levies).
\$18,001 to \$24,000	All excess levies and regular levies on the greater of \$40,000 or 35% of assessed valuation (\$60,000 max.).
\$18,000 or less	All excess levies and regular levies on the greater of \$50,000 or 60% of assessed valuation.

## PROPERTY TAX DEFERRALS

If you are 60 years of age or retired because of physical disability, and your disposable income is \$34,000 or less, you may qualify for property tax deferrals. The state allows property tax deferrals on up to 80 percent of the equity in your home. The deferral program applies to your principal residence and up to five acres, if zoning requires a larger parcel size.

Under this program, you pay no property tax until the home is sold.

The state pays the deferred taxes, and in exchange, receives a lien against the property equal to the amount of owed taxes plus 8 percent. Total taxes are collected when the property is sold or passed on.



## How to apply for property tax breaks

For information on both property tax exemptions and deferrals, call your county assessor:

**King County Assessor ..... 206-296-7300**

**Skagit County Assessor ..... 360-336-9370**

**Snohomish County Assessor ..... 425-388-3540**

**Whatcom County Assessor ..... 360-676-6790**

For more information about our state's property tax laws, call:

**Washington State Department of Revenue**

**..... 1-800-647-7706**

# 39th Legislative District

State Representatives  
**KIRK PEARSON • DAN KRISTIENSEN**

## Contact us if you need help

We are here to serve as well as to represent you. Whether it is concerns about property taxes, problems with state health care coverage or long-term care, or other matters related to state government, we can help. Whatever your question or concern, don't ever hesitate to contact our offices.

Here is our contact information:

### Rep. Kirk Pearson

#### **DISTRICT OFFICE**

912 3<sup>rd</sup> - Suite A  
Sedro-Woolley, WA 98284-1684  
(360) 856-3588

#### **OLYMPIA OFFICE**

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(360) 786-7816  
(During legislative sessions only)

On the web: <http://hrc.leg.wa.gov/members/pearson.htm>

### Rep. Dan Kristiansen

#### **OLYMPIA OFFICE**

PO Box 40600  
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(360) 786-7967 (Staffed throughout the year)

On the web: <http://hrc.leg.wa.gov/members/kristiansen.htm>

**Toll-free legislative hotline: 1-800-562-6000**



**Rep. Kirk Pearson in front  
of the 39<sup>th</sup> District office  
in Sedro-Woolley.**

- Protecting seniors in the state budget
- Prescription drug discounts available
- Getting the property tax relief you deserve

**INSIDE:**

**Rep. Kirk Pearson**  
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• **39th District**

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